

OFFICE POLITICS: INVITABLE DEALINGS AT WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

Organizational dynamism and competition between the organizations is universal phenomenon. Likewise employees in the organizations are also exhibiting their competitive behavior among their colleagues. Competition is appreciable when it is healthy and delivers constructive results but unethical approach to gratify one's needs or greed is termed in this research paper as 'politicking' or 'politicking behavior'. 'Taking advantage of situation' is primarily indicated in politicking behavior. Every organization is operating with profit motive or service motive; same way every employee picks any one among these to ensure he/she makes profit in career. Organizations enhance profit by adopting different strategies through using technology and human capital in the right direction. In this process cutthroat competition emerges and fittest survives. Fittest in this context is the organization gives best quality of products and services for the best price. Here consumer or buyer is benefitted. Few organizations opt backdoor to curb and destroy their competitor by scheme which is unethical or illegal and it is predominantly used against their rival company. In this process cutthroat competition may emerge but smartest only can survive. As companies encounter rivals who are competing in the market and who can be threat or speed breakers, employees also presume, pursue that a colleague can be a hurdle for their career growth if he/she is allowed to perform in the same organization. This perceived thoughts creates insecurity which leads such employee to have a strategy, 'which can be performing better than perceived competitor', or 'destroy him through an unethical mean' which is quoted here in this research 'politicking in the organization'. This research made an attempt to explore reasons for politicking behavior of employees; circumstances encourage such behavior, and steps to be taken by the management to handle politicking behavior in preventing damage to organization.

KEYWORDS: Politicking, Human Capital, Backdoor, Curb, Unethical, Rival

INTRODUCTION

Talent is attracted and given employment in the organizations but same organization fails to retain talent or fails to utilize it to the fullest as well as for longest duration. Talent is made to grow in the organization by the opportunity given at workplace to its employees and it encourages him to take higher or additional responsibilities in the organization which can attract non cooperation from colleagues. An employee whom an organization considers as 'ideal employee' because he is systematic, prompt, transparent, performer is always at risk in his career because non-ideal employees feel that they are suffocated when there is chance of comparison. Because there is high chance of benchmarking in the organization considering 'ideal employee' as employer expects 'best return on investment' made in the form of wage. When management's prescriptions and expectations (Sandeep K, 2012) mismatch with the employees deliverable. The statuesque in the work environment is felt disturbed by one employee who is noted as ideal employee, who can be treated challenger to colleagues in the organization and they must be ready to adopt change in the organization by digesting increased priority to

their colleague. People with positive attitude accept the fact that he deserves to be given priority by the management with facts which management considered. But there is every chance that one or more employees who fail to accept their colleague's elation in the organization. Employee/s with negative perception (politicking employee/s) try to create an environment against an employee whom they treat 'challenger' (politick-able employee) to ensure that ideality which management considered and appreciated cannot remain in the organization, and management was wrong in its decision. Politicking in the organization is a battle between politick-able employee and politicking employee/s at workplace.

Conceptual Frame Work

Politics has been routed in every human's personality and it is unavoidable part of human relations. 'Shakuni' a famous role in the story of Mahabharatha, smartly played politics being with the team of 'Kaurawas' and he ensured that he instigated their leader against team 'Pandawas' where finally 'Shakuni' took revenge against Kaurava by provoking him to go against his cousins. Hence Shakuni made Kaurawa to dig his grave being in Kaurawa's team. Backstabbing is the core characteristic of politicking behavior. It is human nature to assume roles to boost personal interests at the expense of others. Office politics arises when employees tend to misuse their power to gain undue attention and popularity at the workplace. Employees indulge in work politics simply to tarnish their colleague's reputation to obtain advantages and come in the good books of their superiors

Office politics is synonymous with mystery, insincerity where it is played for deal making, rumors, power brokers, self-interest, image building, self promotion and factions. Problems arise when politicking becomes grossly negative and overshadows the well-being of the organization as a whole. Office politics is a covert power whose sources do not appear on organizational charts. He further defined office politics as the 'processes in which individuals or groups within an organization use non- formally sanctioned power tactics to advance their aim'.

Political landscape is a set of hierarchies that link the political players together. In other words Political landscape is what defines relationships between colleagues at a given time. Drafting of this landscape begins with the leaders of the organization influencing the formal hierarchy; which defines the reporting structure and indicates the political setup of the organization as it was initially intended.

Politics reduces the productivity of individuals and eventually the organization is at a loss. People tend to spend their maximum time in pulling each other's legs and playing nasty politics at work. Studies indicate that considerable time and energy are lost to solving problematic issues, originating from influences of office politics in organizations with weak cultural expectations. It is expected that developing a positive organizational culture that facilitates certain values is an important steps in eliminating effects of office politics. The tradition of an organization is frequently the prime indicator of predictable and conformist employee behavior. Organizations with weak commands or communication, and ineffectively managed cultures are breeding grounds for unenthusiastic, dysfunctional interpersonal dynamics referred to as "office politics".

The reasons for engaging in negative politics are as varied as the people perpetrating the act. However, they can be classified under one of several prevalent, negative variables: (a) limited resources and opportunity for advancement, (b) employees' emotional insecurity, (c) over competitiveness, (d) a win-loss organizational attitude, (f) the need for personal acceptance, and (g) the most common motivator – self interest.

Change is another common trigger for an increase in office politics. Ideally, change should encompass the meaningful involvement of everyone being affected (as much as possible). Uncorroborated change can create a “political Fiefdom” (Jinkner, 1999), resulting in fear, uncertainty and the triggering of self-protection action.

Office politics is a resulting phenomenon of this dysfunctional behavior that occurs in the workplace. It is characterized as covert, often unethical and selfishly motivated, encompassing actions that are not performed in the best interest of the organization. This self-serving and destructive nature of office politics is what makes it an important issue to business leaders, employees, and shareholders alike.

Political behaviour plays an important role in the behaviour of both leaders and subordinates when decisions are to be made and specific people in the organisation show a preference on how things should be done (Smit and Cronje, 1982). Employees know it is tricky and risky to be involved. The very nature of political behaviour makes it tricky to approach in a rational and systematic way. Success will require a basic understanding of the reasons for political behaviour and common techniques for engaging in political behaviour (Griffin and Moorhead, 1986). Griffin and Moorhead (1986) define organisational politics as the activities carried out in organisations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty or dissensus about choice. Decisions ranging from the location of a manufacturing plant to the location of the company coffee pot are subject to political action. In any given situation, individuals may engage in political behaviour to further their own ends, to protect themselves from others, to further goals they sincerely believe to be in the organisation's best interests, or simply to acquire and exercise power. Power may be sought by individuals, by groups of individuals or by groups of groups. (Riaan Johan Pio, 2000).

The earliest comprehensive definition was provided by Mayes and Allen (1977) which is as: “Organizational politics is the management of influence to obtain ends not sanctioned by the organization or to obtain sanctioned ends through non-sanctioned influence means.” Sue Jones(1978), University of Bath, in “Organisational politics – only the darker side?” defines politics as “the actions which persons undertake in pursuit of certain personally significant outcomes to influence others whom they see as having the power of various kinds to facilitate or hinder those outcomes and also different and potentially conflicting concerns to their own”. According to Mangham 1979; politics is the struggle of reasonable men to have what they consider to be right and proper prevail. More specifically political behavior is defined as organizationally non-sanctioned behavior (e.g., Ferris, Russ and Fandt, 1989; Gandz and Murray, 1980; Porter, Allen and Angle, 1981) which may be detrimental to organizational goals or to the interests of others in the organization (e.g., Ferris et al., 1989; Gandz and Murray, 1980; Porter et al., 1981).Organizational politics refers to behaviors “that occur on an informal basis within an organization and involve intentional acts of influence that are designed to protect or enhance individuals “professional careers when conflicting courses of action are possible” (K. R. Sowmya, Dr. N. Panchanatham, 2003).

Implementation of “Positive” Office Politics

Consulting guru Peter Block coined the phases “positive politics” for an approach that embraces the use of power, but in a way that builds up others in the process. The positive politician talks up others to their superiors with sincerity. The positive politician negotiates with others to find mutually beneficial solutions to conflict. The term “office politics” is usually applied in reference to the negative behavior of backbiting and undercutting”. On the other hand, management

consultants, human resource managers and others increasingly are using it to refer to the many unwritten rules that involve getting along with others, being noticed and appreciated, and following the protocols of the organizational culture. The politicking has multiple meanings. The first goes back to classical Greece and it is derived from the word 'polis' which literally means the city or in simple words, a community. More specifically, it refers to decision making within and about the community. To be political, to live in the polis, As Hannah Arendt tells us, means that everything to be decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence. Then the political then points to a specific mode of decision making by words, not by force (Rajeev Bhargav, Ashok Acharya 2008).

Office politics was once considered a tool used by upper management seeking to climb the corporate ladder, political behavior is now often seen as a poly used by people at all levels to gain a competitive edge or simply to survive

Research Design

This survey-based, empirical research study was aimed at understanding political behavior in the workplace a comprehensive, structured questionnaire was drafted and pretested with help of a detailed review of literature relevant to the current field of investigation was personally administered to the middle management and above employees working in private organizations in Karnataka state of India. Convenient sampling tool was used to collect opinion from the respondent and total sample size for this study is 46. Employees who have served more than 6 months at the time of data collection are only given the questionnaire to gather their opinion.

Hypothesis

A. Office Politics is Common Challenge in Organization

Politicking behavior is learnt and developed by employees to safeguard self priorities by creating discomfort situation to opponent. Environment which one has grown facilitates peculiar pattern of behavior because he felt that, such behavior can rescue from uneasiness and accelerates pleasure of self satisfaction. Awareness of self as he understood about his personality and environment where he operates can help him to set a strategy to fulfill his personal agenda which is quoted in this study as politicking in organizational context. Any politicking behavior of employee/s against another has specific objectives and it is intended destruction of opponent. The objective may be chasing him out of organization, assassination of opponent's image through allegations or rumors which finally results in victimized submitting his resignation letter or surrendering. Success or failure in fulfilling politicking agenda by the politicking employee is totally depends on his strength, weakness, opportunities, and threats and same to politick-able with regard to withstanding or clearing of the place by seeking alternative office address. Politicking behavior which is initiated by one employee or his team against opponent colleague can backfire only if management understands pulse of the issue or able to read hidden agenda.

B. Presence of Collude-Able Authorities Looking for Exchange of Material or Non Material Incentives

Preferential differences between people are very common which appears as difference of opinion. This creates a battle at workplace many a time as differences of opinions are not connected to organization's interest but to personal interest. An employee with limited professionalism and skill-sets feels discomfort and realizes that he cannot compete with an emerged performer / emergent power due to skill deficiency. This incompetency leads him to get sidelined in the organization. Usually he sets a strategy to infect the environment in the organization against his opponent as he feels he is

the competitor. He attempts to trace employees with similar mindset and develops a task group. A negative strategist is 'politicking employee' in this article is the one who identifies ways and means to curb or destroy his perceived opponent. Usually this task group makes all arrangements to 'frame' perceived opponent. He gathers 'collude-able' colleague opinion about targeted prey. Politicking employee behaves most of the time as well-wisher, true mentor but he creates appropriate platform to appear as tormentor when identified prey is weak. Employee having a network within the organization also matters a lot in politicking behavior. Employees with long service in the organization relatively appear stronger than new employees. They exercise better internal network with appropriate understanding of organizational dynamics which helps them to identify collude-able colleague who need politicking employee in future days to assist them in similar acts.

Management team spends much time in managing but fails to lead, forecast the challenges and adopt suitable counter strategies to minimize damages to organization. iGate's Mr. Phaneesh Murthy was sacked based on sexual harassment charges made against him by his subordinate. Entire episode damaged image of organization with in few hours as the matter is reached to social audit. Employees and public expressed their opinion as majority condemned and few said relationship is very common in IT industry. With regard to above quoted issue we can say that, management failed to manage the public perception appropriately. Stakeholders can only speak and express their opinion to the media as their entry is limited to regulate any such acts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Presence of Politicking Behavior in Organization

Politicking is Universal Phenomenon	Frequency	Percent
Somewhat agree	21	45.7
Strongly agree	25	54.3
Total	46	100.0

No organization is excluded from politics played by its employees. Each employee is well aware that there are some employees play politics and involving team members may differ. From this research it is proved that, the office politics is a universal phenomenon. The reason behind this can be the tendency of power gratification or thirst for it among employees as well as intolerance towards colleague's growth or performance.

Table 2: Colleagues in My Present Organization are Involved in Office Politics

Opinion on Employees Involvement in Politicking	Frequency	Percent
Somewhat disagree	1	2.2
Neither agree- Nor disagree	17	37.0
Somewhat agree	22	47.8
Strongly agree	6	13.0
Total	46	100.0

About 60 percent of employees are in the opinion that the employees are involved in office politics. It appears that management has limited access or control over employees bullying their colleagues for unethical purposes. From this research it is very evident that office politics is universal issue which follows employees as shadow. Knowingly or unknowingly employees become part of office politics. Prominent perception which every respondent expressed is 'office

politics is unethical' or 'it is a dirty game'. Employees express their intolerance to office politics and they recall one or more incidents in their career that they felt they were mistreated and agony which they underwent due to office politics

Table 3: Employee's Politicking Behavior is Always a Hurdle for Professional Growth

Office Politics is Hindrance for Professional Growth	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	2	4.3
Somewhat disagree	3	6.5
Neither agree- Nor disagree	8	17.4
Somewhat agree	14	30.4
Strongly agree	19	41.3
	46	100.0

About 11 percent of people are in opinion that even if there is office politics; their career growth cannot encounter challenges with regards to stability of their job. But more than 71 percent feel 'office politics troubles employee's performance, morale and hampers job satisfaction'. Further it also deteriorates harmonious relationship among employees and leads reduced trust between employees. In totality it simply destroys employee relationship with organizational. Office politics played by one or more employees makes victimized employee weaker and he gradually loses interest in his work as he is troubled at workplace for no mistake of his. He loses enthusiasm to work with perfection and higher dedication.

Table 4: Office Politics is Always Planned but Strengthened, Activated through Rumor Because Management Neglects

Office Politics is Planned and Grows Because Management Neglects Politicking Activities	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	2.2
Somewhat disagree	2	4.3
Neither agree- Nor disagree	11	23.9
Somewhat agree	26	56.5
Strongly agree	6	13.0
	46	100.0

Office politics always carries assassination of image of person targeted. Such strategy of the employees is unproductive and spoils work atmosphere. Many times management has clear knowledge about the said strategy against an employee. But management watches it without taking any steps to curb the unethical practice (politicking) because management is always keen to see that employee's position is weak and scared of stability in the organization, so such employee will be more submissive in nature. Aspect came to light from this research is management does not neglect the politicking behavior in office, but tries to take advantage of such behavior by being neutral. 69% respondents are in the opinion that management neglects office politics. Reasons behind this may be that the employee who cannot safeguard self from office politics planned against him is inefficient, not smart, and not suitable to their work environment. By the weak position created on the part of a targeted employee management can win the hearts of many others who appeared capable in playing office politics. Management always wants strategists and who wins and not the one who loses. Present business world has very limited space for ethics, sincerity, transparency, straight forwardness. But encourages reaching goal or profiting by any ways. Hence it is very evident that the trend today is 'employees love their job but not the company which they are working', so attrition is major challenge for employees.

Many a times management also appears as the part of the office politics by being silent to see that unjust is happening to an employee for no mistake of his, or targeted employee is fixed / trapped. Management sometime acts as authority colluded with the politicking team or employee. Management loses its respect and value in its own employee fraternity being contaminated by dirty office politics

Table 5: When Uncertainty Exists Office Politics Prevails More

Uncertainty is Main Reason for Office Politics	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	2.2
Somewhat disagree	9	19.6
Neither agree- Nor disagree	8	17.4
Somewhat agree	19	41.3
Strongly agree	9	19.6
	46	100.0

Lack of clarity in policy, process gives space to take advantage of confusion created by it. People are tending to take advantage of such situations and read between the lines so they can use the situations for their advantage. 61% respondents say that uncertainty is one of the predominant reasons for office politics. Uncertainty gives opportunity for opportunists to bake their cake. Absence of decision taking authority, mistake occurred unknowingly by an employee, creating negative perception by quoting a circumstance which destroys image of a person are the some of the examples of uncertainty which is misused by ethically unsound employees.

Table 6: Shortage of Resources Also can Create Office Politics

Opinion on Shortage of Resources Also can Create Office Politics	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	3	6.5
Somewhat disagree	4	8.7
Neither agree- Nor disagree	14	30.4
Somewhat agree	22	47.8
Strongly agree	3	6.5
	46	100.0

Less infrastructures availability would also lead to office politics as many employees are dependent on limited infrastructure. This kind of situations employees who want to make another person scapegoat would usually make resources are unavailable to targeted person, so he appear as non performer to the management. If targeted person tries to convince management that the resources were used by other employees, he may be blamed saying “when other employees can manage with available resources, but you cannot. This shows you are not interested to perform better. So you may need to look for suitable office address for you if this continues”. Nearly 54% say employees dependency on infrastructure or creation of artificial deficit of resources also a part of office politics. More than 30 % respondents stay neutral, may be because infrastructural deficit also can be used as weapon in office politics. If same computer system is shared by many employees in single user id, data can be deleted and trouble other employees. Sadist behavior is very common in office politics.

Table 7: Group Dissatisfaction on a Policy, Procedure can Also Lead Office Politics

Opinion	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	2	4.4
Somewhat disagree	3	6.5
Neither agree- Nor disagree	6	13.0
Somewhat agree	25	54.3
Strongly agree	10	21.7
	46	100.0

About 76% said that, when a group of employees are dissatisfied or not comfortable with a procedure/ policy then they involve in office politics and create an environment that makes others to accept that the politicizing group's views must be considered to prevent further damage. They plan something in such a way that, their convenient process is error free and the best one to execute. Management remains neutral when majority are against a system even though management knows which is black to practice. But management would wait for right time to manage the mismanagement but remains silent witnessing that a good employee's image, prestige gets assassinated.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude office politics to be replaced by appropriate HR Strategy, human capital management strategy which is absolutely respected and widely accepted by every employee of the organization. When any action is supported by uniform policy or the system it shall be transparent and it becomes the statute for the company, and violating such guidelines attracts punishment for wrong doing. Office politics is just a dirty game, if management feels that it cleared someone by this dirty game, same management has to pay huge for its encouragement towards dirty politics in upcoming days as it loses value in employee fraternity. Management being an observer than just listeners to rumors and also not backing but sacking employees who are indulge in unethical practices would limit office politics. This can result safe and healthy work environment in the organization. Existence of collude-able authorities looking for exchange of material or non material incentives encourages office politics.

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